

Photos by Spc. Bill Putnam, Army News Service



Soldiers, NCOs compete to see who's the Army's best

By Spc. Bill Putnam

A medic assigned to 25th Infantry Division (Light) and an Infantryman assigned to 3rd Infantry Division (Old Guard) have been named as the U.S. Army 2003 Soldier and NCO of the Year, respectively.

Soldier of the Year, Spc. Russell A. Burnham of 1st Brigade, 25th ID, Fort Lewis, Wash., and NCO of the Year, Staff Sgt. James W. Luby of the Old Guard at Fort Myer, Va., were among 22 of the Army's best Soldiers who converged at Fort Lee and Arlington, Va., to compete for the honor of being named the Army's best NCO and Soldier of the Year.

The competition to select the Army's second Soldier and NCO of the Year began at Fort Lee with a tough three-day competition, Sept. 14-16.

The Soldiers and NCOs represented the Army's 11 major commands like U.S. Army Europe, Special Operations Command and U.S. Army Pacific.

The competition forced the Soldiers to strain, sweat and think their way to meeting the Army standard in events

ranging from an Army Physical Fitness Test to common task testing.

They competed against one another in seven events worth 50 points each. The events included weapons qualification, the Army Physical Fitness Test, land navigation, hands-on common task testing, a 50-question multiple-choice written exam, a written essay and a mystery event.

The mystery event turned out to be a timed six-mile road march in body armor, loading bearing vest, Kevlar helmet and 25-pound rucksack that the Soldiers had to complete in 90 minutes or less.

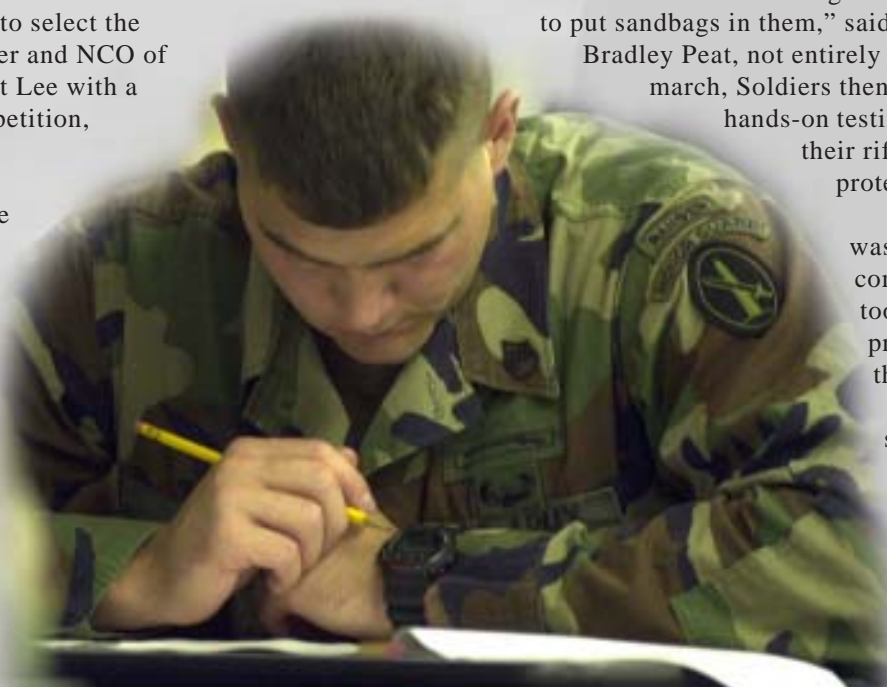
"If their rucks don't weigh that much, they're going to put sandbags in them," said Command Sgt. Maj.

Bradley Peat, not entirely joking. After the march, Soldiers then had to complete more hands-on testing and qualify with their rifles in their M-40 protective masks.

Obviously, preparation was the key for all of the competitors; all of whom took individual approaches to training for the competition.

"We started at square one. We took the [memorandum of instruction] and ran down each task," said Burnham, the 24-year-old Soldier.

Burnham's sponsor,



Sgt. Maj. Kerry Kolhof, assisted Burnham in preparing for the competition. Instead of just memorizing answers from manuals, Kolhof paired Burnham with subject matter experts who taught him the tasks.

"That way, he could answer the questions no matter how they were asked," Kolhof explained.

Luby chose a different approach. "My platoon sergeant and first sergeant allowed me to do my own thing and trusted me that I'd do it," said the 23-year-old NCO. "One of the biggest things is I have a lot of great NCOs I work around, and any time I had a problem, they'd help me out."

The competition picked back up when a board of command sergeants major convened by Sergeant Major of the Army Jack Tilley interviewed the contestants in Arlington, Va., Sept. 18. The winners were named during a Sept. 19 ceremony in Arlington.

Surprisingly, this is only the Army's second Soldier and NCO of the Year, said Tilley. The idea for the competition came to him when he was the 1st Armored Division command sergeant major from 1992-1997. When two 1st Armored Division Soldiers were named the U.S. Army Europe Soldier and NCO of the Year, Tilley asked the Army leadership what was next.

"And they said 'nothing,'" Tilley said. So Tilley wanted to organize something that would recognize excellence.

A few competitors asked why the Army even scheduled this event while the nation is at war.

That's easy, Tilley said. The Army needs to recognize excellence in the enlisted ranks, he said. And holding a competition this year shows the Army is continuing to do "normal things" while at war, he added.

Since part of the program is to transfer the winners to Washington, D.C., Burnham will move from



A competitor splashes through the wetlands on the Fort Lee, Va., land navigation course.

Fort Lewis to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Both Luby and Burnham received over \$17,000 in cash and prizes, including an all-expense paid trip to Walt Disney World, U.S. Savings Bonds and travelers checks.

"The best thing I got from this competition is I learned that senior NCOs are phenomenal, and they are the most professional people in the world," Burnham said.

"Before I entered the competition, all I could think of was becoming an officer. Now, after meeting all these great senior NCOs, I can see [myself becoming] a sergeant major."

(Editor's note: Spc. Bill Putnam is a staff writer for the Army News Service. Sgt. Chad Jones

contributed information to this article.)

Soldier and NCO of the Year 2003



Spc. Russell A. Burnham, FORSCOM

Burnham serves as an Evacuation Specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Infantry Bn., 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash. A native of Arizona, Burnham is married with two children and is currently attending Pierce College.

Burnham was selected as the 1st Brigade and 25th Infantry Division Soldier of the Year and I Corps & Fort Lewis Soldier of the Year.

Staff Sgt. James W. Luby, MDW & NCR

Luby serves as a squad leader in Co. E, 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard), Fort Myer, Va. A native of Maryland, Luby is married with one child. He was selected as the Military District of Washington and National Capital Region NCO of the Year.



Staff Sgt. James M. Murphy, FORSCOM

Staff Sgt. Murphy serves as a Cavalry Fighting Vehicle Commander with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Knoxville, Tenn. A native of Tennessee, Murphy is married with two children and is currently enrolled in eArmyU. Murphy was selected as the First Army Soldier of the Year and as Regimental, State and First Army South NCO of the Year.



Spc. Brett F. Thurman, NCR

Spc. Thurman serves as a Training NCO for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard), Fort Myer, Va. Thurman has attended courses through Northern Virginia Community College. He was selected as the Military District of Washington and National Capital Region Soldier of the Year.



Staff Sgt. Michael D. Mosca, TRADOC

Staff Sgt. Mosca serves as a Training Operations NCO with Co. C, 705th Military Police Bn., Fort Leavenworth, Kan. A native of New York, he is married with one child and is currently enrolled at Kansas City Community College. Mosca was selected as the 705th MP Battalion NCO of the Year and Fort Leavenworth and Combined Arms Center NCO of the Year.



Spc. Claudia Sida, TRADOC

Spc. Sida serves as a Personnel Administrative Clerk at the NCO Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas. Sida is currently enrolled at El Paso Community College working on an associates degree in Criminal Justice. She previously completed a one-year program at the International Business College in El Paso. Sida was selected as the Fort Bliss and Training and Doctrine Command's Soldier of the Year.



Staff Sgt. Marcus A. McClain, USAREUR

Staff Sgt. McClain serves as a Platoon Sergeant with Co. C, 82nd Engineer Bn., 1st Infantry Division, Bamberg, Germany. A native of Indiana, he is married with two children. McClain was selected as the 1st Infantry Division NCO of the Year, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army NCO of the Year and was inducted into the Sergeant Morales Club.



Sgt. Nicole J. Rejiester, USAREUR

Sgt. Rejiester serves as a Military Police Patrolman/Team Leader with the NATO Support Activity, 80th Area Support Group, Brussels, Belgium. Rejiester holds a bachelor of science degree in Criminology from Niagara University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Counseling. She was selected as U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army's Soldier of the Year.



Sgt. Shane E. Smith, AMC

Sgt. Smith serves as a Gunner with Battery B, 1st Bn., 194th Field Artillery, Selfridge, Mich. A native of Iowa, he was selected as the Headquarters, U.S. Army Materiel Command NCO of the Year and the Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command NCO of the Year.





Sgt. Brandon M. Parrett, AMC

Sgt. Parrett serves as a Test, Measurement & Diagnostic Equipment Support Specialist with 95th Maintenance Company, 725th Main Support Bn., Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. A native of Indiana, Parrett is married and was selected as the U.S. Army Materiel Command Soldier of the Year, U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command Soldier of the Year.

Sgt. James J. Engel, 8th Army

Sgt. Engel serves as an Emergency Care Specialist with HSC, 168th Medical Bn., 18th Medical Command, Camp Walker, Taegu, South Korea. A native of Georgia, Engel is married with two children and is a nationally registered emergency medical technician. He was selected as the 8th Army NCO of the Year.



Pfc. Jesse J. Whaley, 8th Army

Pfc. Whaley serves as a Training Room Clerk/Fire Direction Specialist with Co. A, 1st Bn., 15th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, Camp Casey, South Korea. A native of Oklahoma, Whaley was selected as 2nd ID Soldier of the Quarter, and the 8th Army Soldier of the Year.

Sgt. 1st Class Samuel D. Morris, MEDCOM

Sgt. 1st Class Morris serves as an Instructor/Writer with Co. G, 232nd Medical Bn., 32nd Medical Bde., Army Medical Department Center and School, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. A native of Virginia, Morris is married with three children. He was selected as the Medical Command NCO of the Year.



Sgt. Ha Thu Tran, MEDCOM

Sgt. Tran serves as a Medical Laboratory Technician with the Fox Army Health Center, Redstone Arsenal, Ala. Born in Vietnam, Tran holds a bachelor of science degree in Biochemistry from the University of California-Riverside. She was selected as Redstone Arsenal, Fox Army Health Center and Southeast Regional Command Soldier of the Year.

Sgt. Matthew J. Neville, USARPAC

Sgt. Neville serves as a Senior Instrumentalist (Saxophone Player) with the 9th Army Band, Fort Wainwright, Alaska. A native of Wisconsin, Neville has been taking courses through the University of Alaska Anchorage, and was selected as U.S. Army Pacific's NCO of the Year.



Spc. Timothy J. Norris, USARPAC

Spc. Norris serves as a Training Assistant with Headquarters and Headquarters Det., 58th Signal Bn., Okinawa, Japan. A native of California, Norris is married with two children. He is taking college courses through the University of Maryland and was selected as U.S. Army Pacific's Soldier of the Year.

Staff Sgt. Steven W. Cato, SMDC

Staff Sgt. Cato serves as a Section Sergeant with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Satellite Control Bn., Schriever AFB, Colo. A native of Texas, Cato has been taking college courses through Southeastern Oklahoma State University. He was selected as the Space and Missile Defense Command NCO of the Year.



Sgt. Jennifer A. Swift, SMDC

Sgt. Swift serves as a Satellite Network Controller with 1st Satellite Control Bn., Schriever AFB, Colo. A native of California, Swift has completed course work through Central Texas College towards an associate's degree in Applied Technology. She was selected as the Space and Missile Defense Command Soldier of the Year.



Sgt. 1st Class John C. Dozer, USASOC

Sgt. 1st Class Dozer serves as a Small Group Leader with the Special Warfare Center and School and the NCO Academy, Fort Bragg, N.C. A native of Florida, Dozer is married with one child and is currently taking courses at Campbell University in pursuit of a degree in Computer Science. He was selected as U.S. Army Special Operations Command NCO of the Year.



Spc. Jason A. Parsons, USASOC

Spc. Parsons serves as a Radio Operator with Co. A, 2nd Bn., 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Lewis, Wash. A native of Arkansas, Parsons is married and was selected as the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Soldier of the Year.



Staff Sgt. David A. Cooke, USARSO

Staff Sgt. Cooke serves as a Protective Services Agent with Headquarters, U.S. Army South, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. A native of Alabama, Cooke is married and has taken courses through Central Texas College. He was selected as the U.S. Army South Soldier of the Year.



Pfc. William A. Ibrahim, Jr., USARSO

Pfc. Ibrahim serves as the Unit Armorer for Co. B, 470th Military Intelligence Group, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. A native of Texas, Ibrahim was selected as the U.S. Army South Soldier of the Year.

